DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 543 EA 021 165

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TITLE Reform and Non-Reform in Education: The Political Costs and Benefits of Reform Policies in France and Japan.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 44p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Educational Administration; *Educational Change; Educational Development; *Educational History; *Educational Improvement; Educational Policy; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Politics of Education
IDENTIFIERS *France; *Japan

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the perception and anticipation of political costs and benefits affects decisions about whether and how plans for educational reforms are to be pursued. Two case studies of major educational reform attempts are described: France and Japan. The study analyzes the two societies' underlying dilemmas, which manifest themselves in instructively different ways. The discussion of educational reform in France focuses upon the first and the second cycle of the "secondaire," the four-plus-three structure of French secondary education that follows upon the five years of the "elementaire." The politics of educational reform in Japan focuses upon a review of the history of educational reform during the post-World War II period, emphasizing the work of the "deliberation councils" and the role of the Ministry of Education. (43 references) (SI)

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REFORM AND NON-REFORM IN EDUCATION:

THE POLITICAL COSTS AND BENEFITS OF REFORM POLICIES IN FRANCE AND JAPAN

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Prepared for discussion at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989

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1. EDUCATIONAL REFORM: THE POLITICAL COSTS AND BENEFITS

This paper is predicated on the notion that, in engaging in reform policies, the state stands both to incur costs and derive benefits; this cost-benefit calculus is presumed to play an important role in the consideration of specific reform policies. While this assumption is meant to hold across different policy areas, it seems to apply with particular poignancy to the realm of education. This has to do with the fact that, in most societies, education holds a critical position in the social fabric as the key mechanism for both the allocation of social statuses and the inculcation of cultural values. While other social agencies--family, workplace, media--play a subsidiary role in status allocation and/or socialization, education stands out as a uniquely powerful agent in both respects. It is this very centrality that makes changes in an educational system a matter of such salience: For the advocates of change, it carries the promise of significant repercussions for the status and value system of a society; for the opponents of change, and by very much the same token, the societal outcome of educational change is unacceptable.

We seek to shed some light on this dynamic by looking at two countries which, in recent history, have both engaged in major attempts at reforming their educational system: France and Japan. Even the casual observer of educational policy in these two countries over the last thirty or forty years will agree that reform of the educational system has been a matter of high tension; the 'events' of 1968, the parents' demonstrations for parochial schools in 1984, or the student demonstrations in the winter of 1986/87 in France bear as much testimony to this as the prominent place of education on the agenda of the Occupation administration in post-war Japan and the ubiquity

of references to both the blessings and the curses of Japanese education among internal as well as external Japan-watchers.

What exactly do we mean by "costs" and "benefits" in the context of educational reform? We are obviously not talking merely, or even predominantly, in economic terms, even though the material costs and benefits of reforms can be far from negligeable; the introduction of school bussing programs or the adoption of a national language of instruction or changes in the certification of teachers are cases in point. What concerns us primarily in this paper, however, are the <u>political</u> costs and benefits of educational reform or, more specifically, how the perception and anticipation of political costs and benefits affects decisions about whether and how plans for educational reforms are to be pursued.

In this sense, <u>cost</u> can consist of

- the alienation of important groups in society,
- the need for substantial additional resources (material, human),
- the possibility of failure (reform may not be achieved, or it may not achieve the expected results), or
- the loss of whatever advantages the status quo may have.

By contrast, <u>benefits</u> can consist of

- effective improvements in the quality, relevance, or efficiency of the educational system (and the credit which the state is given for them),
- creating the image of a responsive, flexible, adaptive state,
- the favorable diffuse/symbolic connotation of reform, or
- the analytical value of reforms (in empirically demonstrating what kinds of changes society and its different elements will and will not accept).

Most important for understanding the political cost-benefit calculus of reform, however, is the fact that reforms (especially in areas as sensitive and value-laden as education) tend to generate conflict: over the objectives of a reform, the means to achieve the objectives, the evidence cited in support or in opposition to the reform, the institutions/people/strategies chosen for implementing the reform, apprehensions over unintended consequences of the reform, etc. The anticipated amount, intensity, and persistence of reform-related conflict is a key factor in the political cost-benefit calculus and, we argue, in explaining the course and fate of particular reform projects.

We are further prepared to argue, along the lines of the earlier writings of one of us (Weiler 1983; 1985), that the cost-benefit calculus that is involved in the politics of educational reform has something to do with the issue of the state's legitimacy. While analysts of the modern state are far from agreement in this matter, there is a substantial body of evidence and discourse to suggest that the normative authority of the state--its legitimacy--is everything but to be taken for granted, and has to be seen as a profoundly precarious commodity. This precariousness affects and compounds the conflictual nature of reform policies: if conflict is indeed endemic to reform projects in areas as sensitive as education, concern for the state's legitimacy makes the reduction or management of conflict an even more important consideration in whether, how, and when reforms are to be implemented. Speaking in cost-benefit terms again, could it be that, while the state might obtain considerable gains in legitimacy from actively contemplating and advertising major educational reforms, it might at the same time face prohibitively high costs in legitimacy from unleashing the kinds of conflicts that would accompany the actual implementation of those reforms?

We are proposing to explore this line of argument in two case studies of major attempts at educational reform. These two cases are not in any sense representative of a larger set; when it comes to issues as complex and as context-bound as the politics of educational reform, the classic notion of "controlled" comparisons across national entities becomes problematic, and the only methodological option is to add iteration to the rich texture of policy histories. We are achieving this iteration by proceeding from one case, France, where we have identified a certain pattern in the political dynamics of reform policies, to another case, Japan, where we have initial grounds for suspecting both a similar pattern in some respects, and a significant departure from it in others. As a result of this "comparison", we will not be able to advance firm conclusions on the political nature of educational reforms for all times and all societies; we expect, however, to show how in two otherwise rather different societies some underlying dilemmas of the modern state manifest themselves in instructively different ways.

2. THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN FRANCE

Speaking of "educational reform" in the French as in any other context covers a considerable variety of initiatives -- from changes in the extent and nature of pre-school programs to reforms of university education, and from changes in content and curriculum to changes in the structural arrangements for selection, orientation, and certification. For purposes of this paper, our principal attention will be on the first and the second cycle of the "secondaire", the four-plus-three structure of French secondary education that follows upon the five years of the "élémentaire". It has been the secondary level that has been at the center of much of the reform activity over these last three decades, and it is here that the experience of abortive attempts has been most pervasive (Weiler 1988).

2.1 René Haby: The "collège unique"

The period of our review starts out with a real reform -- the extension of compulsory schooling to the age of 16 in 1959, which ultimately became effective in 1967, and over which there seems to have been very little dissent. Most of the initiatives that followed focused on the internal structure of, and the "channeling" of students through, the post-elementary phase of the system. Berthoin's idea of an "observation cycle" ("cycle d'observation") during the first two years of the secondary ("Sixième" and "Cinquième") and of a distinction between general and technical secondary schools ("collèges d'enseignement général" and "collèges d'enseignement technique") anticipated some of the key notions of later reform projects, but the effort "ran out of breath" rather quickly as it did not really challenge the existing structures (Commission

1981, 15). It is interesting to note that the new technical secondary schools were found to adapt much more readily and effectively to new and changing needs than their generalist twin -- probably a function of the more tangible pressures from a rapidly changing technical and professional clientele (ibid.).

1963, under the leadership of Minister Fouchet, saw the consolidation of a "middle" level of post-elementary education in the form of the "collèges d'enseignement secondaire", encompassing the first cycle of the "secondaire" (sixième through troisième). In response both to a tremendous increase in the number of students at that time and to a perceived need for more effective selection mechanisms, a system of three tracks or "filières" is introduced into this middle level to differentiate between students of different types and levels of aptitude and thus to anticipate the all-important differentiation and selection arrangements of the second cycle. Besides the question of how much of the Fouchet reforms was actually implemented, the assessment of how far this initiative went in changing the nature of the post-elementary system is mixed and depends, not surprisingly, very much on how much importance a given observer attaches to greater equality of educational opportunity as one of the criteria for assessing educational reform. While the new system opened up the top part of the first cycle of the secondaire (years three and four) to a much larger number of students, it subjected at the same time the students to a much more rigorous and thorough system of tracking in the "filières". The net result, given the existing social dynamics of educational access and success in France, was that the pattern of school-based social stratification, "the relationship between educational programs and membership in a given socio-occupational category" remained basically unchanged (Commission 1981, 18).

By contrast, the reform projects of the 1970s, reflecting the impulses of the protest movement of 1968, were designed to move more or less boldly into an era of greater equality of educational opportunity, while at the same time facing the challenges of an increasingly modernization- and technology-conscious French society. The initial step had been taken by Joseph Fontanet, whose tenure as a Minister of Education and as a reformer was cut short by the death of Georges Pompidou (Charlot 1974). In his succession, René Haby, serving as Minister of Education under France's new centrist President, Giscard d'Estaing, and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, became identified with what has probably been the most ambitious and comprehensive educational reform project of the Fifth Republic. The thrust of Haby's plans reflected as much the limited success of the earlier reform history in France as the signs and the spirit of the times. The inability of earlier French efforts à la Fouchet to pry open the close linkage between social status and educational opportunity became all the more conspicuous in the light of efforts in a number of other countries to move towards more "comprehensive" forms of post-elementary education in an attempt to overcome or reduce the class biases of earlier and more stratified systems: Sweden had paved the way by introducing the nine-year comprehensive school in 1962 (Heidenheimer 1978; Husén 1986); Great Britain was moving gingerly towards "comprehensivization" in secondary education (Peterson 1973), and a major social experiment was underway in the Federal Republic of Germany to introduce a comprehensive Gesamtschule to overcome the built-in stratification of the traditional three-tier system (Raschert 1974; Weiler 1983).

The key piece of the Haby reform, the notion of the "collège unique" with an essentially common core ("tronc commun") for the entire first cycle (four years) of the secondaire, corresponds in its philosophical and pedagogical

orientation quite closely to these other developments around Western Europe. The structural principle of the common core was, in theory, diametrically opposed to the "filières" of the 1963 project, and was designed to create "conditions of entry and educational programs that are identical for all" (Commission 1981, 19). While the first two years of the collège were to be strictly the same for everybody, the next two years were to become an "orientation cycle" which would combine pre-professional electives with a continuation of the basic core. The second cycle -- the last three years of the "secondaire" -- was to be reformed in the same spirit: Following the "Brevet des collèges" at the end of the first cycle, students moving on into the three-year "lycées générales" (rather than into the two-year "lycée d'enseignement professionelle") would follow a largely common curriculum for the first two years, after which they would take the first part of the Baccalaureate examination ("Bac") before entering the final and more specialized year of the "terminale", preparing for the final half of the "Bac" (Coombs 1978).

The spirit of the Haby project is clear, and the scope of its proposed implementation comprehensive -- reaching all the way from expanding pre-school education to modifying the modalities of university entrance: By delaying, until well into the second cycle, the points of irreversible "tracking" (through selection/orientation) towards one or another ultimate career option, students are to be given more time and help in identifying and developing their true talents and vocation. Implementation aside, the concept itself represents a major change over previous designs of the French educational system.

The design and adoption of this project was already a major political accomplishment, especially considering the power and reluctance of some of the major interest groups concerned (see Coombs 1978, 496-501). Implementation,

however, was a different matter altogether. The first minor changes were introduced in 1977, but some of the more significant changes -- especially those having to do with the "common core" in the first cycle -- did not begin to reach the schools until the beginning of classes in the fall of 1980. By that time, Haby had been replaced by Beullac at the head of the Ministry of Education, the plans for the reform of the second cycle -- an integral part of the reform package -- were still on the drawing board, and it was only seven months to the presidential election of May 1981, which brought François Mitterand and a socialist government to power in France and M. Alain Savary to the Ministry of Education.

The assessment of how much of a real reform Haby was able to accomplish is made difficult by this peculiar timing of French macro-politics. It is even more problematic to speculate, of course, how much he would have been able to accomplish had the calendar been more clearly on his side. When the commission appointed by the new socialist government to take stock of the country's condition (the "Commission chargée d'etablir le bilan de la situation de la France") reported in late 1981 on the state of the educational system, it concluded its extensive review of the "réforme Haby" by stating quite categorically that the "collège unique" did not exist -- at least not in the sense that the first cycle of the "secondaire" was across the board of similar quality and made up of a reasonably homogeneous student population (Commission 1981, 46). This observation has to be considered with some caution. First of all, the 1981 Commission was, after all, set up by a government that had just defeated on the electoral battlefield the very proponents of the Haby reform, and could hardly be expected to render a charitable or even objective judgment on it. Furthermore, to expect such a homogenization to emerge from within a highly stratified

educational system in a matter of a few years may well have been unrealistic. Even so, the data on the regional and urban/rural disparities in the quality of educational programs and in the educational mobility of students indicate that the system in 1981 was a long way from what Haby and the French legislature had planned in 1975. More significantly even, it seems that the old demons of tracking had found a way to move back into the first cycle where, under the guise of some of the electives in the "orientation cycle" (years three and four), some of the old "filières" began to re-emerge. It appears that large numbers of students at this level were directed towards the (lower-status) option of vocational and professional schooling (the "lycée d'enseignement professionelle"), without the benefit of a real orientation which would have been open to the full range of options for the second cycle, including the academic route to the "lycée générale" (Commission 1981, 37-38). The factfinding panel of 1981, in assessing this situation, even goes as far as speaking of "new tracks of exclusion" which, "more or less disguised, function essentially for the children who are socially already the most disadvantaged" (ibid., 52). Two years later, the diagnostic of Legrand's report about the <u>collège</u> speaks of the "eviction into parallel tracks" (referring to the "orientation" that channels students into the vocational track at the lycée level) and, worse yet, of the "segregation into tracks without hope" (Legrand 1983, 168 and passim). Thus, whether because of lack of time or other factors, the evidence suggests that the success of the Haby reform, measured by the degree to which the French system of post-elementary education was actually made more "comprehensive", was rather limited, and did not move beyond a certain level of homogenization in the first two years of the first cycle of the "secondaire".

2.2 Savary and Chevènement: Between equality and quality

The next three years of educational policy in France (1981-84) are associated with the name of Alain Savary and with an unprecedented effort of analyzing the state of the educational system and the options for its further development. Expert commissions, studies, and reports abounded -- the mobilization of talent and effort on behalf of developing a new vision for the future of French education was impressive indeed. A substantial body of evaluative insight into past developments and of projections of future options found its way into the various reports that Savary's administration commissioned (e.g., B. Schwartz 1981; L. Schwartz 1981; Prost 1983; Legrand 1983). The Legrand report ("For a democratic collège") completes the assessment of Haby's effort undertaken by the 1981 Commission. Interestingly enough, it puts a great deal of emphasis on the need to avoid the re-emergence of "tracks" in the upper levels of the first cycle, confirming once again the critical role of that linkage between first and second cycle of the "secondaire" in improving the permeability of the system for students from widely divergent backgrounds. To get rid of the "segregative tracks" (filières ségrégatives) at the level of the third and fourth year is seen as a "political imperative" and as a way of getting back to Haby's idea of a truly comprehensive full first cycle, from the first through the fourth year. This same purpose is to be served by a number of curricular changes, notably the introduction of subject options alongside the traditional literary options for the two last years of the first cycle. However -- and here the lessons learned from the non-reform of Haby become clearly audible -- "the choice of these options must under no circumstances lead to reconstituting tracks"! (Legrand 1983, 169-170) Once again, the ground was prepared, this time under politically exceedingly favorable circumstances and

with a healthy budget allocation to boot, for a major challenge to the seemingly intractable collusion between the internal structure of French secondary education and the reproductive dynamics of the French social structure; the "collège démocratique" was at last to consummate the dream of the "collège unique".

In pursuing this objective, Savary's political style was seen as breaking with the tradition of "grand reform projects" à la Fouchet and Haby, and as being guided by a sense of "discretion and pragmatism" (Darmau and Maté 1986, 3; cf. Savary 1981). But a different part of his reform program, the plan for closer association between the parochial schools and the state, did reach out for another grand design: the "great unified and secular system of public education" ("le grand service public unifié et laique de l'éducation nationale"). It was this project that proved to be the undoing of Savary and, to a large extent, of even those reform projects that had nothing to do with the controversy between state and private education that erupted in 1984. On June 24, 1984, tens of thousands of parents of students in private schools took to the streets to protest the government's plans for enhancing state control over private education; the government had to withdraw its bill and its Minister of Education, and Alain Savary was succeeded by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who held the office for the next two years, until the victory of the conservative coalition of Jacques Chirac in the legislative elections of March 1986. The spectacular failure of the attempt to redesign the relationship between public and private education provided a rude awakening and a tough lesson for the socialist government; now that it was clear that the dream of the "great unified and secular system of education" was over, flexibility, diversity, and quality became the operative terms of the debate within the Parti Socialiste.

Against the background of the massive demonstration of strength of the private school, the only feasible course of action seemed to be to show that the public school was, after all, the better school (Le Monde de l'Education 1985, 8-9).

Jean-Pierre Chevènement fully identified with that agenda, and became its skillful promoter. While he claimed to continue some of the initiatives of his predecessor, especially where the reform of the lycées are concerned (Ministère 1986, 16), he was quick in establishing an identity and a vision of his own for the future of French education. Very little of the massive process of consultation and reflection during the Savary period finds its way into the Chevènement era (Le Monde de l'Education 1987, 9). The achievement of greater equality remains on the agenda, but rather less conspicuously than before. Instead, the overriding preoccupation now is with restoring to the school its most crucial function of transmitting knowledge, and with enabling it to do so with as much competence and quality as possible. Concerns with international competition, with mastering modern technologies, with making the most of France's "human resources" loom large on Chevènement's policy agenda. Referring to the argument over public and private education as the "wrong" kind of fight, he affirms that "the only educational battle worth fighting is that over the quality of instruction", and continues: "We have to restore the school of the Republic, and give it the means to be once again the best. This is a decisive challenge for France, for intelligence is our principal resource." (cited by Darmau and Maté 1986, 4). There is a similar programmatic connotation in the title of his book, "Apprendre pour entreprendre" (1985) -- a play on the French words for "learning" and "managing a business", somewhat crudely equivalent to "learning for earning". It is therefore not surprising that technology looms large in the plans that were worked out under Chevènement for the curricular content of both

the collèges and the lycées. This becomes especially clear in the plans for a new and prestigious "filière technologique" in the new law of December 20, 1985 (Ministère 1986, 11-14 and passim): France's survival as an independent entity in the beginning 21st century is seen as requiring the best trained personnel possible, and a highly achievement-oriented, quality-conscious school system is to play a crucial role in this process. The central tendency is "to restore the school rather than to reform it" (Darmau and Maté 1986, 3), i.e., to bring the school back to its basic values of excellence, hard work, and professional or pre-professional competence. Avoiding the very term "reform" (in favor of "restoration") is meant to distance the effort of the Chevènement era from its hapless predecessor.

2.3 "Stop the reformitis!": Monory and Devaquet

Once again, however, the clock became a factor in French educational policy. Chevènement announced his plan for the reform of the lycée in November of 1985, just a few months prior to the elections to the Assemblée Nationale in March of 1986. The left lost its majority in the legislature, a new coalition of gaullists (RPR) and center-right groups (UDF) took over the reins of government in "cohabitation" with an incumbent Socialist president, Jacques Chirac was named Prime Minister, René Monory Minister of Education, and Alain Devaquet, Vice-Minister in charge of higher education and scientific research.

The rest is recent history and has, against the background of this overview of the last thirty years of educational policy in France, some semblance of déjà vu. Upon assuming office, the second thing M. Monory did (the first one was formally to abolish the "loi Savary" of 1983 about the reform of higher education) was to erase unceremoniously Chevènement's entire reform of the

lycée. Not immune either to what the education editor of Le Monde calls "the virus of reformitis" (Le Monde 1986), Monory proceeds to develop, in the course of 1986, his own reform of the lycée, just as, in his turn, Alain Devaquet proceeds to drafting a new law on higher education to replace the "loi Savary", leading to the "loi Devaquet" that served as a rallying point for the massive student demonstrations in November and December of 1986.

There is little point in adding to this repertory a summary of the reforms that Monory had in mind for the lycée (see Le Monde de l'Education 1987, 11, for a brief summary). After the "loi Devaquet" for the universities (as well as the political career of M. Devaquet) went to an early demise at the hands of a generation of students who had become tired of having their future played around with by eager reformers of different persuasions in rapid succession, M. Monory felt moved to withdraw his reform project for the "secondaire" as well. "Stop the reformitis" (ibid., 9) -- the message that came, loud and clear, from the students in the street (and, incidentally, from many of their parents) -- was heard at both the Ministry of Education and at the Hotel Matignon. Prime Minister Chirac declared "the pause", a moratorium until further notice of all social reforms that his government had committed itself to undertaking. And as once again presidential elections began to loom on the political horizon, there was little inclination to risk interrupting the moratorium and invite further unrest before the Spring of 1988.

The elections of 1988 have brought François Mitterand back to the presidency for another seven years. The new socialist government of Prime Minister Michel Rocard has started out by including education prominently among its priorities; it has upgraded the status of the Ministry of Education and put it in the hands of one of its most distinguished figures, Lionel Jospin. In the

first programmatic statement from M. Jospin's office, there is much reaffirmation of the importance of the school "at the heart of the Republic", and a reference to the impending Bicentennial of the French Revolution in underlining the importance of equality. In more concrete terms, there is more attention to the situation of teachers than there has been for some time. Thus far, however, any reference to "reform" is conspicuous for its absence (Le Monde 1988).

3. THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN JAPAN

3.1 The History of Educational Reform in Japan

Not unlike France or other countries, the history of education in Japan reveals a regular succession of debates on educational reform. In his analysis of the history of educational reform in Japan over the past hundred years, Ikuo Amano stresses the following characteristics: (a) Debates on education were emphasized and educational change took place at critical turning points in the process of modernization of Japan; (b) a "deliberation council" approach was often employed as a means of policy-making; and (c) issues for educational reform shifted from one period to the next: from efficiency (in the 1890s) to equalization (in the 1910s), to democratization (after 1945), and to diversification (in the 1970s) (1988, 94-123). For purposes of this paper, we will limit our review to the history of educational reform during the post-WW II period, focusing on the work of "deliberation councils" and the role of the Ministry of Education.

The end of World War II caused drastic change in the area of education under the strong influence of the Occupation authorities (see Reischauer 1981, 235-236). The notion of "democratization" replaced the ultra-nationalistic and militaristic educational ideologies of the prewar period. Based on the Report of the United States Education Mission to Japan (1946), the Fundamental Law of Education was enacted on March 31, 1947 (see text in Horio 1988, 400-401), and a new school system was established. This task was undertaken by a deliberation council ("Kyoiku Sasshin Iinkai", or Council on Educational Innovation), which was attached to the Prime Minister's office, but operated under the guidance of the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Occupation forces (Itoh and Naka 1987, 213-215). The new school system and the Fundamental Law of Educa-

tion, which guarantees equal opportunity in education, facilitated postwar democratization and economic development in Japan. At the same time, those provisions of the Law which prohibit religious and political education in schools have remained the target of controversy to the present day.

After the Allied forces withdrew in 1951, the first reaction to the new educational system came from an advisory committee appointed by then Prime Minister Yoshida to review overall policies set under the Occupation authorities ("Seirei Kaisei Shimon Iinkai"). The report of the committee criticized the educational reform implemented under the Occupation authorities as suffering from "over-democratization." The report recommended to restore some aspects of the prewar educational system by, for example, diversifying the single track system, creating vocational schools at the secondary level, and increasing the power of the Ministry of Education. At the same time, the Ministry of Education attempted to promote the role of education in teaching patriotism. In fact, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1951 led the Japanese government to a commitment (in 1953) to promote the role of education for security and strategic purposes against the Soviet bloc. This commitment further strengthened the Ministry's emphasis on patriotism as part of geography and history courses, and moved the educational system further away from the original policies made under the auspices of the GHQ (Itoh and Naka 1987, 234-235). Overall, the somewhat "revisionist" reaction by the Yoshida committee set the tone for a persistent conflict over educational policy between conservative and radical groups, and between the Ministry of Education and the Japan Teachers' Union, which has continued to this day (Amano 1988, 110-111).

The 1946 council ("Kyoiku Sasshin Iinkai"), after having been reorganized in 1949, was disbanded in 1952. In the same year, a new council (Central

Council on Education, "Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai") was created under the authority of the Minister of Education. Unlike previous councils which recruited members from various interest groups, the members of the Central Council on Education were appointed by the Minister of Education. This method of appointment tended to place a limit on the Council's capacity to consult and represent diverse opinions and interests. The Central Council on Education still exists today, and the composition of its membership has been a focal point of criticism (Amano 1988, 115).

Some authors have criticized deliberation councils attached to ministries, including the Ministry of Education, as covers for a ministry's "remote control" (Johnson 1982, 36). Even though the law that was part of the postwar reform (the Law to Establish the Ministry of Education, "Monbusho Setchi Ho", of 1949) reduced the power of the Ministry of Education from its prewar supervisory role to a guidance and advisory capacity, the Ministry has continued to exercise a great deal of central administrative control. Teruhisa Horio points out the problematic nature of this situation, and how the courts have tended to exacerbate it. He argues that:

> The carefully orchestrated, step-by-step revisions and violations of the essential integrity of the Fundamental Law of Education enacted by the government, the Ministry of Education, and the various regional boards of education reveal the peculiar nature of the relations between education and the law (1988, 163).

Horio proceeds to cite numerous examples of how both political and legal practice since the postwar reforms has violated some of the basic principles guaranteed by the 1949 Law of Eduction, and concludes: "In short, the principle

of the rule of law (hochishugi) has been used to destroy the foundations of the postwar reforms of education and educational law" (1988, 164).

The long-term value of the postwar educational reform and of the educational philosophy codified in the 1949 Fundamental Law, and the role and function of the Ministry of Education have remained sources of continuing controversy in Japan for much of the last four decades. It was thus not surprising when, at the beginning of the 1980s, a new Prime Minister once again saw fit to focus the country's attention on the future of its educational system.

3.2 The Origin of the National Council

Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982-1987) had made educational change an important priority on his political agenda when he first assumed office. He had expressed his own views about education on various occasions (e.g., Asahi Shinbun December 28, 1983; see Ohmori 1987, 24-29). One of his main arguments was that postwar education in Japan had shown a tendency to neglect indigenous values. He maintained that it was necessary to restore to education the traditional values which were inherited from Confucianism and Buddhism, such as filial piety, good morals, and patriotism. Given the experience of previous deliberation councils attached to ministries, he had reason to suspect that fundamental change would not occur through a body closely attached to the Ministry of Education. Therefore, when he designed the mechanism for implementing his vision of educational change for Japan, he created the National Council on Educational Reform (NCER) as a separate unit that was directly attached to his office.

Not surprisingly, the creation of the National Council under the Prime Minister's office met with resistance from the Minister of Education, who

expressed concern over possible threats to the political neutrality of education, although some traditional rivalry with the Prime Minister (who belonged to a different faction of the Liberal-Democratic Party [LDP]) may have been involved as well. After consultations between the two parties, an agreement was reached that the Council would be attached to the Prime Minister's office, but that the NCER's deliberations would take into consideration the proposals made by the Central Council on Education (which belonged to the Ministry of Education). The rationale given for retaining the NCER under the Prime Minister's office was that educational reform was too pressing and too complex an issue to be handled by any single ministry, and that it had therefore to be assigned to the jurisdiction of the Prime Minster, which would assure that it would receive the necessary input from all ministries concerned. This rationale notwithstanding, the Government continued to receive criticism that educational issues might become more politicized as a result of attaching the NCER to the Prime Minister's office (Ohmori 1987, 32-37).

A brief examination of the political context at the time will help to place Nakasone's educational reform initiative into a broader perspective. Clearly, the time seemed ripe for educational change, especially in the light of what were perceived to be increasingly serious problems in Japanese education. In fact, or at least in the public's perception, educational problems such as overheated competition in entrance examinations, violence in schools and bullying of weak students and teachers, and a rising tide of truancy and delinquency had reached a point where drastic change seemed to be called for. Against the background of rising delinquency among children, violence was reported in 1983 from 13.3% of all public junior high schools and from 8.6% of all public high schools, while "bullying" was reported, on

average, from every other school in 1985 (Kyoiku Seisaku Kenkyu Kai 1987, 525-527).

There were other factors as well, however. Soon after Nakasone took office in 1982, his rightist policy goals of revising the Constitution and developing a strong defense initially reduced public support for his regime, which dropped from 37% in December of 1982 to 29% in February of 1983; it later rose again and stayed between 40% and 53% for the period March 1984 to October 1986 (Asahi Shinbun May 23, 1987). Considering that Nakasone had originally planned to run for a second term of office, this initial drop in public support was ample cause for concern. By taking a major initiative in the direction of educational reform, Nakasone intended to create an agenda that could be expected to appeal to opposing factions within his party as well as to other political parties and the public, thus increasing both his partisan and his popular basis of political support (Harada 1988, 46-47; Ohmori 1987, 29-31). At the same time, Nakasone had linked educational reform to the broader administrative reform which he had launched to rationalize and revitalize state administration (Asahi Shinbun December 26, 1983).

Notwithstanding the importance of these considerations in explaining the emergence of Nakasone's reform initiative, one has to acknowledge that a critical impetus for educational reform came from the country's economic and financial community (Harada 1988, 37-40). An important vehicle for channeling this input were a number of study groups, such as the group that was originally associated with the Kyoto Roundtable for Thinking About the World (a creation of the industrialist Matsushita Konosuke) and was then transformed into a "Discussion Group on Problems Related to Education and Culture" under the auspices of the Nakasone Cabinet (Horio 1988, 364).

In an election campaign speech in December of 1983, Nakasone had identified a number of projects for the reform, including the diversification of the screening system for the secondary and the university level, the encouragement of volunteer work, moral education, the internationalization of education, and raising the quality of teachers (Ebihara 1987, 9). The official terms of reference given the NCER by Nakasone on September 5, 1984 are rather vague ("to consider basic strategies for necessary reforms with regard to government policies and measures in various aspects, so as to secure such education as will be compatible with the social changes and cultural developments of our country"), but the annotations single out "change in the industrial structure, progress of the information society and increasing desire of the public for lifelong learning" as illustrative of the kinds of changes to which a redesigned educational system would need to respond (NCER 1988, 555-556). In his address to the first meeting of the NCER, Nakasone became somewhat more specific and highlighted the problems of violence, of excessive emphasis on individuals' academic achievement, and of the inflexibility of the system. While he acknowledges the importance of internationalizing Japanese education to keep pace with the increasing degree of internationalization of Japanese society, he underlines his belief "that educational reform should aim to preserve and further develop the traditional Japanese culture . . . so that these Japanese citizens may be able to contribute to the international community with a Japanese consciousness" (NCER 1988, 560-561).

In recruiting the members of the NCER, Nakasone had emphasized the need to select them from a broad range of groups with an interest in education. The 25 "regular" members who were appointed in August of 1984 represented a cross-section of the economic, cultural, and academic community, including represen-

tatives of major financial, corporate and union interests as well as university administrators and professors, school teachers, and artists. A second group of 20 was appointed as "specialist members" in December of 1984 to add further expertise to the membership of the NCER without changing in any major way the complexion of the original membership composition (for a list of the members, see NCER 1988, 557-559). While, on the face of it, the membership of the NCER appeared broadly representative, some closer analysis suggests that it leans, on the whole, heavily toward what Aoki Satoshi identifies as "conservative nationalism" (1986). Allegations of biased representation on the NCER subsequently also caused criticism among opposition parties, the Japan Teachers' Union, and the media.

3.3 The Deliberations and Conclusions of the National Council

Over the three-year span of its deliberations (1984-87), the National Council addressed and debated a broad range of issues facing Japanese education in altogether 668 meetings, 14 public hearings, and 7 study missions to 13 different countries. Ostensibly to maintain a certain transparency and dialogue with its constituencies and publics, the Council chose to publish a series of three reports (June 1985, April 1986, and April 1987), before submitting an overall synthesis of the three preceding reports in its fourth and final report in August of 1987 (for the full text of all reports in English translation, see NCER 1988).

The Council's recommendations focussed on six principal sets of issues, reflecting to a large extent the kinds of challenges that had been identified at the outset by Nakasone and the initial deliberations of the Council. The six sets of issues addressed in the recommendations were as follows:

1. The development of lifelong learning structures (correcting undue emphasis on educational background in the evaluation of individuals; mobilizing jointly the educational potential of school, home, and community; promoting sports);

2. The diversification and reform of higher education (individualizing and upgrading higher education institutions; reforming the procedures and qualifications for selecting university entrants; promoting scientific research; financing and management of higher education);

3. The enrichment and reform of elementary and secondary education (improvement of teaching and of the quality of teachers; reform of the textbook system; adjusting the structure of upper secondary education; pre-school and special education; school-community relations);

4. Reforms for coping with internationalization (education of Japanese living, and returning from, abroad; foreign students in Japan; foreign language education; teaching Japanese to foreigners);

5. Reforms for coping with the information age (establishing an "information morality;" new systems of teaching and learning; the utilization of information media);

6. Educational administration and finance (deregulation; decentralization; the problems of the juku; cost and finance, including the role of the private sector).

In addition to these six more general issue areas, the Council added two specific sets of recommendations that dealt with (a) needed reforms of and in the Ministry of Education, and (b) changing the beginning of the school year (from April to Autumn).

Besides covering a broad range of issues, a closer perusal of the reports shows that these recommendations are far from trivial; there is no way within

the confines of a brief paper to do justice to the richness of the recommendations and their supporting arguments. At the same time, from the point of view of how far they go in really coming to terms with the issues, the Council's conclusions vary widely. Some recommendations get very concrete and specific, as in spelling out new modes of textbook review and approval (NCER 1988, 505-506) or in proposals to loosen up the rigid structures of secondary schooling (ibid., 509). Others, while not too specific, make a particular point forcefully and in no uncertain terms, as in the recommendations on the deregulation of an overly regimented educational system (ibid., 521-523). The large majority of the recommendations, however, appear either extremely vague and abstract (as in the case of what to do about the juku [ibid., 525-526], or the future direction of "moral education"[ibid., 502-503]) or patently unrealistic, as in the admonition that "industrial firms should further strive to recruit new employees from a great variety of institutions, avoiding excessive preference to a limited number of institutions" (ibid., 485, cf. 483-484). Others are limited, in clear disproportion to the importance and complexity of the issue, to very brief statements; the critical issue of university entrance is a case in point (ibid., 495-496). In still other respects, and not unlike a good many other reform proposals, the solution to the ills of education is seen in an increase of resources (as in the case of higher education, ibid., 498-99).

Blue-ribbon commissions, in education as elsewhere, have a natural propensity for making sanctimonious statements. This one is no exception. Even so, however, it is striking how conspicuously the NCER fails to come to terms in any specific or concrete way with some of the most salient problems of Japanese education -- problems which the Council itself in its early stages had identified as being in need of bold, imaginative, and effective solutions. The

competitive frenzy at the key transition points in the system, notably between secondary school and university; the violent subculture of the schools; the lingering questions about what "moral" and "civic" education could and should mean in a modern, internationalizing society: Those issues are certainly not excluded from the Council's deliberations and recommendations, but they are hardly treated with the degree of specificity and firmness that one would have expected from their initial identification as key problems.

It should be noted that this observation applies only to the Council's recommendations, and not to what will become of them in the long march towards implementation through the institutions of the Diet and the Ministry of Education. If, as all evidence about the nature of political decision processes in Japan would suggest, this process is marked by a generally conservative disposition, it is reasonable to expect that, at the end, the NCER's recommendations will be even further diluted -- an expectation shared by many observers in our interviews in Japan.

Why this should be so is, of course, a critical question in our quest to understand the political dynamics of reform and non-reform in education. Some broadly systemic answers are, of course, readily available. For one, commissions are never very good at being precise, specific, and incisive, and much better at general diagnostics and broad statements of intent, and this is all the more true the larger and more heterogeneous the body is. In the case of Japan, there is a general persuasion that cultural traditions in Japan are strongly skewed in the direction of conflict avoidance (even though Okimoto's rendition of this point with reference to the Confucian concept of "harmony" or <u>wa</u> [1988, 214] reads remarkably like what Dahrendorf was saying about Germany in his 1967 classic!); in this perspective, the reason why so much in

the NCER's recommendation looks like compromise by elimination or dilution has deeper cultural and normative roots in the traditions of dispute resolution (see Kawashima and Noda 1988).

These more general explanations notwithstanding, it is instructive to look a little more closely on how conflict was handled in the proceedings of the Council, and how considerations of political costs and benefits might have affected the outcome.

Given the composition of its membership, the National Council was likely on the whole to reflect the views of the dominant groups in contemporary Japanese society on educational policy. However, the nature of the involvement of the Ministry of Education and disagreement over several key issues among the Council members led to a more complex pattern of internal conflict. In response to this situation, the Council members tended typically towards compromise and the elimination of conflictual issues. This became particularly apparent in the following instances.

Immediately after the establishment of the National Council, a first controversy arose over the administrative procedures set by the secretariat. The secretariat for the National Council was staffed by the Ministry of Education, and was located within the Ministry. Members of the National Council, apprehensive from prior experience with Ministry/Deliberative Council relationships, were afraid that the Ministry, by way of the secretariat, might gain undue control over the Council's deliberations behind the scenes. One of the National Council members, Professor Kenichi Koyama of Gakushuin University, insisted on the autonomy of the National Council from the Ministry of Education, a position not unrelated to his advocacy of a reform of the Ministry of Education (cf. NCER 1988, 530-542). The Minister of Education personally met

Koyama and assured him that he would respect the initiative and autonomy of the National Council, and that the Ministry would not intervene in the Council's work (Ohmori 1987, 79-81).

One of the key issues discussed by the National Council was "educational liberalization." This idea originated in earlier discussion at the "Kyoto Round Table for Thinking about the World," and turned out to have strong overtones of deregulation and privatization in the education sector (Horio 1988, 367-369). This issue became a matter of considerable conflict between Working Groups One and Three. Working Group One included some members of the Kyoto Round Table (notably Naohiro Amaya of the Japan Economic Foundation and the publisher and critic Shichihei Yamamoto), who strongly advocated liberalization in the direction of greater deregulation and privatization. Their views were challenged by some other members of Group One, notably Hiroshi Kida, Director General of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, a former official of the Ministry of Education and Director of the National Institute for Educational Research, and Tadashi Minakami, the Superintendent for the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education. The strongest opposition to liberalization came from Working Group Three, which included a number of individuals related to the Ministry of Education (e.g., Kazuhisa Arita, head of a private industrial school [Nishi Nippon Kogyo Gakuen], Sei Sato, President of the National Theatre of Japan and a former official of the Ministry of Education, Akiyo Tamaru, an elementary school teacher, and Atsuo Tobari, a secondary school principal). The opponents of liberalization were concerned over the turmoil that it might create. They maintained that liberalization would create difficulties in the following areas: 1) to maintain a common standard in the quality of education, 2) to provide equal educational opportunities, 3) to

engage in long-term planning of school buildings and related facilities, and 4) the ability of parents to cope with the financial burden of education (Ohmori 1987, 124-126). As the conflict intensified, Amaya proposed to use "emphasis on individuality" as an alternative to "liberalization." Both groups agreed that "emphasis on individuality" was more appropriate inasmuch as it advocated a change of the rigid and homogeneous educational system that currently exists. The term was eventually adopted in the Report, which argued

> ". . . to do away with uniformity, rigidity and closedness, all of which are deep-rooted defects of our educational system, and to establish the principles of dignity of individuals, respect for personality, freedom and self-discipline, and individual responsibility. . ." (NCER 1988, 473);

"liberalization" was avoided as it was too broad, and consequently open to various interpretations (Rinkyoshin to Kyoiku Kaikaku 1985; Ebihara 1987, 69-70; Ohmori 1987, 119-156).

In a similar vein, a variety of moderate and modified expressions were arrived at in an effort to avoid or reduce frictions among different groups. Another such example is the change of the university entrance examinations. The current standardized examination system used for entrance to the national universities aggravates the stratification of schools according to the scores entrants achieve, and intensifies the competition based on the test scores. Initially, Prime Minister Nakasone had urged abolishing the standardized university entrance examination altogether (Asahi Shinbun, June 21, 1985 [evening editions]; cf. Ohmori 1987, 193-194). The First Report of the NCER of June 1985 recommended that the current "Joint First-Stage University Entrance Examination" be replaced with "a new 'Common Test' to be utilized voluntarily

by any university, national, local, or private," emphasizing the discretion of each university "to determine on their own initiative whether it should utilize the common test or not, or in what way it should utilize the test" (NCER 1988, 38). By adopting this moderate stance rather than to abolish the notion of standardized entrance examinations altogether, the Council once again managed to contain the level of conflict over this very sensitive matter. This was due to several factors. The Chairman of the National Council, Michio Okamoto, former President of Kyoto University, had been instrumental in initiating the current system of standardized examinations, and there is some indication that it was in deference to him that the Council refrained from advocating the outright abolition of the examination in the report. Furthermore, the National University Association (Kokuritsu Daigaku Kyokai) was in the process of revising the current standardized examination, and the National Council was reluctant to intervene too aggressively in this process (Ohmori 1987, 193).

The Report of the National Council recognizes the importance of the Fundamental Law of Education. At the same time, however, the Council members debated at great length the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education. Those who were on the "revisionist" side included Kazuhisa Arita (Vice Chairman of the "Association for the Promotion of Social Education Bodies" and Chief Executive of the "Nishi Nippon Kogyo Gakuen" private industrial school, Hidenobu Kanasugi (an Advisor to the Japanese Confederation of Labour [DOMEI]), and Amaya. The discussion focussed on a number of different issues, including the role of religious and traditional values in education. Arita claimed that the religious mind, patriotism, and respect for traditional culture should be included in the Law, which prohibits religious education. The conservative group advocating changes in the Fundamental Law was closely allied with the

mainstream of the LDP and with big business in general (Aoki 1986, 291-306). Their resistance is directed against what they perceive as foreign ideology imposed on the Fundamental Law of Education in the post-WW II years. The counterargument (represented by, among others, Okamoto, the chairman of the NCER) was that the Law has prevailed for a fairly long time, that it has been accepted by the people, and that it would be unrealistic to change it. A compromise was reached such that a broader interpretation of the Law would allow to teach concepts such as filial piety and patriotism, but that policy-making in education should continue to follow the lines of the Law. It was also argued that the Council should attempt to arrive at a clearer interpretation of the Law (Kamakura 1987, 209-216; Ohmori 1987, 158-164) -- a mandate which, as far as we were able to determine, the Council did not honor, quite possibly because the remaining ambiguity about the meaning of the law with regard to such sensitive areas as the teaching of patriotism allowed the pursuit of rather divergent practices.

Another subject on which clear articulation proved elusive was the length of compulsory education. Positions in the Council and the educational community at large ranged from an extension of compulsory schooling from nine to twelve years to reducing it to six years in the name of "deregulation." In the end, no conclusion is reached, and the issue is effectively eliminated from the Council's agenda (Ohmori 1987, 189).

On another structural matter, the First Report of the Council had suggested the possibility of establishing six-year secondary schools as an alternative to the prevailing pattern of three years of junior secondary followed, after a highly competitive entrance examination, by three years in a senior secondary school (". . . a new type of school designed to contribute to the continuous

and progressive development of the personality of students by combining the existing lower secondary and upper secondary education . . ." NCER 1988, 42); the recommendation was incorporated in the Fourth and Final Report of the Council, but only as an "experimental" proposition: the existing system of a two-level secondary system (junior and senior) continues, and it is only "local governments, non-profit corporations ... and other appropriate bodies" that have the "option" of setting up the new type of secondary schools (ibid., 509) -- an arrangement reminiscent of the experimental comprehensive schools ("Gesamtschulen") that were set up alongside the regular, three-tiered school system in West Germany in the early 1970s (Weiler 1983).

Textbook control has been one of the most controversial issues both inside and outside the National Council, and has been the subject of an increasingly intensive political as well as legal debate (Horio 1988, 171-212). The current system allows the Ministry of Education to screen and control the content of all textbooks used in the primary and secondary public schools, including the "decertification" of textbooks that are found to be unsuitable. The Council's Third and Fourth Reports devote special sections to the issues of textbooks in Japanese education (NCER 1988, 303-314; 504-507), and suggest to review and simplify the screening procedure (ibid., 309-310; cf. 505-506). However, the Council does not suggest fundamental changes, and still leaves the leverage of control fully in the hands of the Ministry of Education. In the Council's deliberations on this issue, the principal conflict involved the Ministry and "pro-liberalizationist" groups, represented predominantly in Groups Three and One, respectively. The Ministry of Education, which started out in a relatively weaker position at the outset of the NCER, is said to have gained more overall influence over the Council's deliberations by the time the Third Report was

produced, and this may explain why no fundamental changes were incorporated in the recommendations of the Third and Fourth Report (Harada 1988, 148-161).

Yet another issue with heightened potential for conflict was that of centralization vs. decentralization. Traditionally, the Ministry of Education had exercised more or less full control over local educational administration. The Second Report suggests greater decentralization (NCER 1988, 247-257; cf. 523-524)

> ". . . so that individual localities and individual schools may fully develop diverse identities and exercise independent initiative and creativity, and so that they may reinforce their autonomy, responsibility and capacity to fulfill their own functions" (ibid., 247).

The spirit of this suggestion is forcefully reiterated in the Fourth and Final Report (NCER 1988, 523-524; 530-531): "emphasis should be placed on diversity rather than uniformity, on flexibility rather than rigidity, on decentralization rather than centralization, and on freedom and self-determination rather than uniform control" (ibid., 530). However, what little is said about operationalizing this principle, with the possible exception of some recommendations to strengthen local boards of education, does appear to be consolidating rather than changing the status quo.

Thus, looking at the overall picture of the Council's deliberations and conclusions, the impression is one of considerable reluctance to face up, in specific and concrete terms, to some of the most critical (and, by that very token, controversial) issues in Japanese education. The modes of dealing with these conflictual issues vary; they range from outright deletion of the issue from the agenda (as in the case of school violence) to relegating it to the realm of abstract principles or vague expressions of desirability (as in the

case of frantic competition for educational advancement). In some instances, as in the case of textbook control or the future of juku, there seem to have been attempts at genuine compromises, and it will remain to be seen whether they will carry the weight of the implementation process. On the whole, however, and its bold and far-reaching declarations at the outset notwithstanding, the work of the NCER seems to have been not only under the spell of a strong propensity towards the status quo, but also affected by a persistent tendency to avoid, minimize, or negate major conflict.

4. The politics of reform and non-reform

As the two case studies have shown, there are numerous differences between the French and the Japanese case. In France, there have been a series of reforms over an extended period of time, with periodic and frequent surges of "reformitis", but also with significant discontinuities depending on the partisan or personal agenda of the Minister of Education at the time. In Japan, even though there have been non-trivial changes in the educational system between the major postwar reforms and Nakasone's initiative in the mid-1980s, educational reform appears as a more concentrated "event". Partly as a result of this, there is an even more ambitious quality to at least the initial scope of the reform effort in Japan; reform plans in France such as Haby's "collège unique" are far from being unambitious, but they do focus more on one particular component of the educational system, whereas the initial agenda of the NCER contained just about every element and aspect of education in Japan, from pre-school to university, from discipline to achievement, from textbooks to teacher training, and from curriculum to financing. Lastly, from the point of view of analysis, the French story has the advantage (or disadvantage?) that it

is largely completed, at least for the time being: We know what happened to the reforms plans of MM. Haby, Savary, Chevènement, Monory and Devaquet, and while MM. Jospin and Rocard may in due course come up with their own reform, we already do have quite a track record on what happens to educational reforms once they come off the draving board and face the challenges of implementation. We don't have that same advantage for the Japan case, at least not as far as the NCER's recommendations are concerned. Their implementation is still being debated in Parliament and in the Ministry of Education, and we will not know for some time what the ultimate fate of the recommendations is going to be. is a necessary (although by no means sufficient) reason for changes to occur; in other words, changes that have not been recommended by the NCER are not likely to be implemented, while it remains open which of the recommended changes will actually occur.

All of these differences notwithstanding, the two cases do have several things in common. Both face, as many educational reform plans in modern societies do, the somewhat intractable task of reconciling norms of equity with those of efficiency; both France and Japan seem compelled to acknowledge the demand for knowledge and skills that is part of the challenge of modern technology and production, while at the same time beholden (revolutionary bicentennial or not) to the mandate for greater equity and for not letting the competitive principle get out of hand. The interesting shift in the policy posture of the two socialist Ministers of Education Savary and Chevènement illustrate this dilemma as well as the NCER's laborious attempt to dismantle some of the worst excesses of competitive entrance examinations.

What the two cases also have in common is (a) the expectation that, under certain circumstances, engaging in major educational reform can be politically

advantageous, and (b) the tremendous potential for conflict that seems inherent in pursuing educational reform beyond the level of mere declaration. As one of us has shown elsewhere for the case of France (Weiler 1988), there seems to be good reason to assume that the "political class" in the Fifth Republic saw some distinct political advantages in generating a virtually incessant stream of reform proposals for education. As far as Japan is concerned, it seems clear that Prime Minister Nakasone saw clear gains in addressing what, by the early 1980s, had become a major set of popular preoccupations about the present and future state of Japanese education. His initiative to launch, through the NCER, a major and encompassing reform of Japanese education, could not only count of public approval, but also on an unusual degree of consensus across the different factions of the LDP and, indeed, among parts of the political opposition. For a leader whose political calculus included re-election to a second term in office, these were highly salient considerations. To attach to this overall political project of educational reform, as Nakasone did judiciously, the connotation of both a return to Japan's traditional values and a constructive response to a rapidly modernizing and internationalizing world further enhanced the putative benefits to be derived from this initiative.

But neither in France nor in Japan (nor anywhere else), benefits come without cost. This, as the introduction to this paper has suggested, is particularly true where major changes and reforms of education are concerned, where the political cost of challenging the existing order of power and status would be especially high (Weiler 1985). In France, there were enough indications of the cost of carrying through the various reforms: the resistance of the teachers unions, the outcry of the parents of parochial school children, the massive student protests against Devaquet's plans, and the sheer resistance

of the system itself all provided ample evidence of how difficult and potentially hazardous it would be to go ahead with some of the more far-reaching reform plans.

On the strength of our study of the French (and, previously, the West German) situation, we had concluded on a note of skepticism as to whether the modern state, for reasons having to do with its structural commitment to the existing order in the distribution of power and statuses, was at all capable to consummate major reforms of its educational system, solemn reform rhetoric and protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Whatever else the Japanese case may teach us about the political dynamics of educational reforms (and much more will undoubtedly be learned once the aftermath of the NCER unfolds), it seems to bear out this skepticism. There were certainly high stakes in, and high political gains to be reaped from, Nakasone's initiative. Once the process got underway, however, the issue of educational reform, embedded as it always is in the deep cleavages of society, very quickly revealed its enormous potential for conflict. The tension between traditional and modern norms revealed itself over issues of moral and civic education and reached into the debate about textbooks. Elitist-competitive and more egalitarian visions of Japan's future clashed over such matters as university entrance examinations and selective recruitment practices. And lastly, and perhaps most significantly, a traditional propensity for centralized control and direction of the educational system came into open conflict with the idea of more decentralized and deregulated forms of educational governance. In the face of these conflicts, the NCER tended in most cases to retreat into vague and rather abstract exhortations, verbal compromises, delegation to other bodies, or relatively marginal modifications of the status quo. In those few instances where the Council did

take a comparatively firm stand -- as in the case of administrative deregulation and the reform of the Ministry of Education -- it remains to be seen whether the opposing forces (in this case, the Ministry of Education) will yield to the forces of change; preliminary indications suggest doubt.

For the political calculus of educational reform, the management and containment of conflict appears crucial. While this observation applies to any number of different societies, the threshold beyond which reform-related conflict is being considered dysfunctional (or a threat to the legitimacy of the state) may well vary across countries for reasons having to do with cultural norms and political traditions. From what we know about the two societies that we have considered in this paper, this threshold is likely to be lower in Japan than in France; in other words, the same degree of conflict is likely to be seen as more threatening and dysfunctional in Japan than in France. If this is true, it would mean that the political cost of educational reform (in the currency of conflict) is weighed even more heavily in Japan, which would in turn shed some light on why, even in the relatively unbinding stage of NCER deliberations, the avoidance of conflict plays such an important role.

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